

Is the *Tarāwēh* prayer really 20 *Raka'āt*?

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Observing the *Tarāwēh* prayer during the blessed nights of *Ramaẓhān* is an extremely virtuous act. Many benefits have been enumerated in various hadēths regarding its observance. Amongst them is; whoever stands [in prayer during the nights of] *Ramaẓhān* with *ēmān* and hope [in Allah's reward], all his past sins will be forgiven. [Bukhāri: 2009]

It is important to note that a person shall only be entitled to the benefits mentioned in the hadēths when he performs the prescribed ritual completely and correctly. Incorrect and incomplete acts of worship are never rewarded by Allah.

Today the *tarāwēh* prayer has become an extremely controversial and confusing matter for many Muslims throughout the world, particularly in respect to the number of its *raka'āt*. While many argue that it is 20 others are adamant that it is only 8 thus leaving the average Muslim confused. In order to determine which view is correct it is imperative that we analyze all the prophetic narrations related to this matter. However before exploring this avenue it is important to first resolve whether the *tarāwēh* prayer and the *tahajjud* prayer are the same ritual or not because the argument over the number of its *raka'āt* really stem from this particular point.

The Difference between Tarāwēh and Tahajjud

When conducting a basic study of the Qur'ān and hadēth we find that both prayers are really separate rituals. The *tahajjud* prayer is a prayer that was prescribed for the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and his followers in Sura Al Muzammil during the early days of Islam. At first they were required to stand in prayer for at least half the night. Allah instructed, “*Arise [to pray] the night except for a little. Half of it or subtract from it a little. Or add to it and recite the Quran with measure.*” [73:2-4]

However Allah later relieved the believers of this obligation and announced towards the end of the sura, “*So recite what is easy [for you] of the Quran,*” [73:20].

Ibn Kathēr has interpreted this verse as; “Without any limitation of time. Rather you may stand [in prayer during the night] for whatever period of time is easy [for you].”

This shows that *tahajjud* was a prayer that was practiced in the early days of Islam during the Makkan period; an era in which the only obligation the Muslims had was to pray. This prayer was observed year-round and was not restricted to a particular month during the year.

Regarding the *tarāwēh* prayer or the night prayer of *Ramaẓhān*, this was introduced by the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم during the month of *Ramaẓhān* after its fasts were made compulsory in the second year of the migration. This is confirmed through the following hadēth;

Abu Salmān narrated, “My father told me that Allah's Messenger صلى الله عليه وسلم said, “Allah has made the fasts of *Ramaẓhān* compulsory for you and I have introduced standing [in prayer throughout its nights] to you. So whoever keeps its fast and stands [in prayer] during its [night's] with *ēmān* and anticipation of reward, he will exit his sins (i.e. be absolved of them) in a manner that he will resemble the day his mother gave birth to him.” [Nasa'i: 1603]

This hadēth clarifies that this prayer differs from the *tahajjud* prayer, which the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and his companions رضى الله عنهم observed throughout the years prior to the compulsion of fasting.

The number of raka'āt for the tarāwēh prayer

‘Ā’isha’s رضى الله عنها Hadēth

Today a growing number of Muslims are under the impression that the *tarāwēh* prayer consists of only 8 *raka’āt* based on the following hadēth:

Abu Salama ibn Abdur Rahman reported that he asked ‘Ā’isha رضى الله عنها about the Messenger’s prayer during *Ramaẓhān*. She explained, “Whether it was *Ramaẓhān* or any other month, Allah’s Messenger صلى الله عليه وسلم would not pray more than eleven *raka’āt*. He would pray four [*raka’āt*] and do not ask about their beauty or length. Then he would pray four [*raka’āt*] and do not ask about their beauty or length. Then he would pray three [*raka’āt* of *witr*].” [Bukhāri: 2013]

This narration has been recorded by Imam Bukhāri in his *Jāme’ Al Sahēh* in the ‘Book of the *Tarāwēh* Prayer’. It is for this reason many people have assumed that Imam Bukhari has attempted to establish the number of *raka’āt* for the *tarāwēh* prayer through his hadēth. However was that really his motive? And does this hadēth refer to the *tarāwēh* prayer that was observed by the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم? These questions can only be answered by a person who has studied Imam Bukhāri’s work and has thoroughly understood his methodology.

In his *Jāme’*, Imam Bukhāri establishes a title in the beginning of a chapter, in which he normally makes an assertion and then presents authentic hadēths to support it. It is due to this that scholars have stated, “The *fiqh* of Imam Bukhāri is found in his titles.” In short, if a person would like to truly understand why Imam Bukhāri has recorded a hadēth in a particular chapter of his book, he should check the title of that chapter.

‘Ā’isha’s رضى الله عنها aforementioned hadēth has been recorded in a chapter titled; **The virtue of he who stands [in prayer during the nights of] Ramaẓhān**. From this very heading we understand that by no means has the Imam attempted to establish the number of *raka’āt* for the *tarāwēh* prayer, as is generally assumed. Had this been the case he would have composed a suitable title for it just as he has done in Chapter 10 of the Book of *Tahajjud*. There he has titled the chapter, ‘How the prayer of the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم was and the number of [*raka’āt*] he prayed during the night’. In this particular chapter Imam Bukhāri has presented a total of four hadēths through which he establishes the number of *raka’āt* the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم prayed in *tahajjud*.

One would then wonder as to what virtue the Imam has attempted to establish through the aforementioned hadēth. When carefully studying his work we find that this very hadēth has been recorded in the 16th chapter of ‘The Book of *tahajjud*’ under the heading **‘The Prophet’s صلى الله عليه وسلم standing [in prayer] during the nights of Ramaẓhān and (in) other months’**. This clearly shows that the prayer discussed in ‘Ā’isha’s رضى الله عنها hadēth is the *tahajjud* prayer of our beloved Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, which differs from the *tarāwēh* prayer. Through this chapter the Imam has proved that the *tahajjud* prayer was observed year-round by the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and that the number of its *raka’āt* was consistent.

By presenting this very hadēth in the ‘Book of the *Tarāwēh* Prayer’, Imam Bukhāri has attempted to prove that the reward for the *tarāwēh* prayer is equivalent to the reward of the *tahajjud* prayer. This is understood by the chapter’s title. This does not imply that the two prayers are the same as there are many good deeds that are equivalent to one another in reward however by no means are they considered to be the same ritual. For example the reward for sitting in the masjid and waiting for *salāh* is equivalent to the reward of being engaged in *salāh*, as the following hadēth points out;

“...So when he enters the masjid he will be in the state of *salāh* as long as *salāh* keeps him [from leaving the Masjid].” [Bukhāri: 477]

It is common knowledge that no one considers these two actions to be the same ritual.

An interesting point to note is that none of the authors of the *Sihāh Sitta* (The six authentic compilations of hadēth) have used this hadēth in reference to the *tarāwēh* prayer.

- Imam Muslim has recorded this hadëth in his *Sahëh*, Book 6, Chapter 17; **The night prayer and the number of the Prophet’s صلى الله عليه وسلم *raka’üt* during the night...** and not in Chapter 25; **Exhorting [people] to stand in [prayer during the nights of] *Ramažhän* and that [prayer] is [called the] *Taräwëh* [prayer].**
- Imam Mälik has recorded it in his *Mu’atta*, Book 7, Chapter 2; **The Prophet’s صلى الله عليه وسلم [method of] praying in witr**, and not in Book 6, Chapter 2; **What has been recorded pertaining to standing [in prayer during the nights of] *Ramažhän*.**
- Imam Abu Däwöd has recorded it in his *Sunan*, Book 5, Chapter 26; **The Night Prayer**, and not in Book 6, Chapter 1; **Standing [in prayer] during the [nights of the] month of *Ramažhän*.**
- Imam Tirmidhë has narrated this hadëth in his *Jäme’*, Book 2, Chapter 208; **What has been recorded pertaining to the description of the Prophet’s صلى الله عليه وسلم prayer at night** and not in Book 6, Chapter 81; **What has been narrated pertaining to standing [in prayer during the nights of] the month of *Ramažhän*.**
- Imam Nasa’ië has recorded it in his *Sunan*, Book 20, Chapter 36; **Why witr is [observed] with three [*raka’üt*]**, and not in the Chapter 4 of the same section; **Standing [in prayer during the nights of] the month of *Ramažhän*.**

In conclusion, none of these eminent scholars of hadëth have considered this narration to be connected with the *taräwëh* prayer. They have however unanimously considered it to be connected with the Prophet’s صلى الله عليه وسلم *tahajjud* prayer. Hence this hadëth cannot be used to determine the number of *raka’üt* the Prophet’s صلى الله عليه وسلم observed while praying *taräwëh*.

Jäbir’s رضى الله عنه *Hadëth*

Some people resort to the following hadëth to prove that the number of *raka’üt* for the *taräwëh* prayer is eight:

Jäbir ibn ‘Abdullah reported, “Ubay ibn Ka’b رضى الله عنه came to the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and said, “O Allah’s Messenger صلى الله عليه وسلم something happened to me last night, in *Ramažhän*.”

The Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم asked, “What happened, O Ubay?”

Ubay explained, “Some women in my house expressed, “We cannot recite the Qur’an, hence we shall pray behind you.” Subsequently I led them [in prayer] for eight *raka’üt* and then led the witr prayer.”

The Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم looked like he was happy and did not say anything.” [Ibn Hibbän: 2540]

They contend that this hadëth clearly displays the Prophet’s صلى الله عليه وسلم consent over observing eight *raka’üt* of *taräwëh*. The problem with this hadëth however is that it is unauthentic. Isa ibn Järiah, the individual who reported this account from Jäbir, is a narrator who has been heavily criticized by many hadëth scholars and has been labeled as weak. Ya’hyä ibn Ma’een said about him, “His narrations are not strong,” and in another place he expressed, “He has many ‘*Manäkeer*’ (i.e. hadëths in which the narrator is unreliable and his reports contradict the narrations of authentic narrators).

Imam Nasa'i, Abu Dāwūd, 'Uqayl, Ibn 'Adā and Ibn Jawzī have all rendered him weak. Imam Nasa'i and Abu Dāwūd have gone as far as say, "He is a Munkir Al Hadīth" (a term used to label narrators weak).

Ibn 'Adā stated, "His narrations are insecure [from weakness]."¹

One may argue that Ibn Hibbān has listed him in his book, '*Al Thiqāt* - The authentic ones' and has recorded his hadīth in his *Sahēh* (compilation of authentic narrations) therefore he must be reliable. The reality is that Ibn-Hibbān is renowned for being lenient in authenticating narrators as Sheikh Abdul Fattāh has written in his commentary of '*Al Raf' wa Al Takmil*'. Hence his authentication will not be given any weight, especially when it contradicts the criticism issued by multiple scholars.

Ibn Abbās's رضى الله عنهما *Hadīth*

As for those who assert that the tarāwēh prayer consists of 20 *raka'āt*, they cite the following hadīth:

Ibn Abbās رضى الله عنهما reported, "The Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم would observe 20 *raka'āt* and witr during [the nights of] *Ramādhān*. [Musannaf Ibn Abi Shaybah: Chapter 227 Hadīth no. 13]

Unfortunately this hadīth is also weak because of Ibrāhīm ibn Uthmān being in its transmission chain. Yahyā ibn Ma'een has heavily criticized him and has labeled him as unreliable.

In conclusion, there is no authentic hadīth available that reports the exact number of *raka'āt* observed by the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم in the *tarāwēh* prayer. Hence in such circumstances one must examine the actions of his loyal companions in order to obtain some guidance.

'Umar's رضى الله عنه *Conduct*

There are approximately six narrations that describe 'Umar's رضى الله عنه method of observing the *tarāwēh* prayer. However before analyzing them all, it is important to be aware of the structure of their transmission in order to fully understand them from an authenticator's standpoint.

Firstly, 'Umar's رضى الله عنه practice has been reported by another *Sahābē* named Sā'ib ibn Yazīd. Sā'ib reported his account to three of his students;

- 1) Hārith ibn Abdur Rahman
- 2) Yazīd ibn Khusayfa
- 3) Muhammad ibn Yūsuf

Yazīd ibn Khusayfa then reported this to three of his students

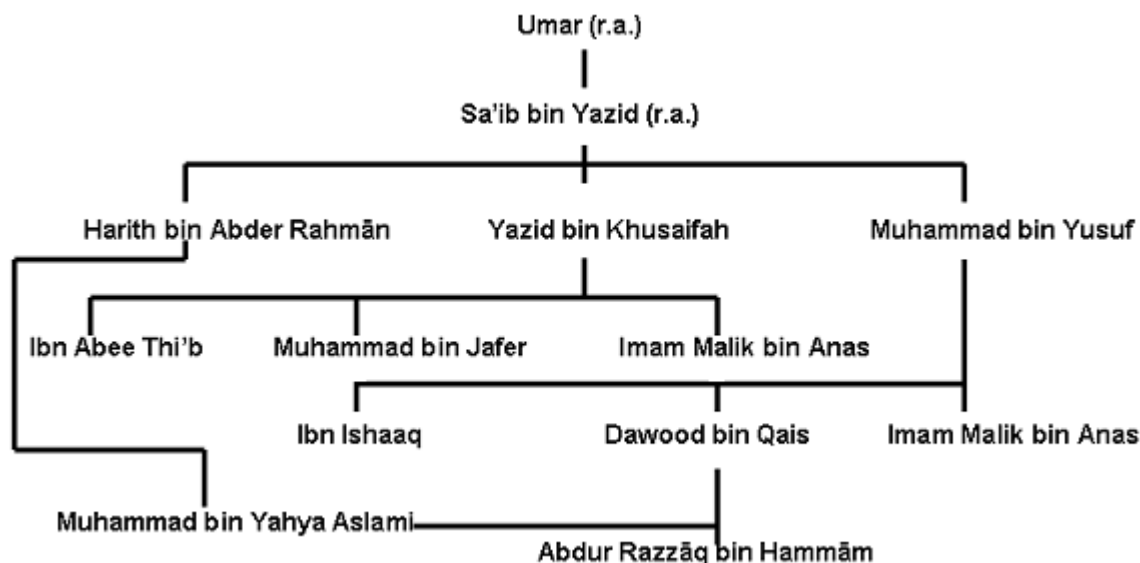
- 1) Ibn Abe Dhi'b
- 2) Muhammad ibn Ja'far
- 3) Imam Mālik ibn Anas

Muhammad ibn Yūsuf reported this account to many of his students with variations in the number of *raka'āt*. Amongst them are;

- 1) Imam Mālik
- 2) Ibn Ishāq
- 3) Dāwūd ibn Qays.

¹ Mēzān Al E'tedāl p. 374-375 vol. 5, Muhammad ibn Ahmad Al Dhahabi, Dar Al Kotob Al Ilmiyah, Beirut, Lebanon 1995
Tah'dhēb Al Kamāl p. 542 vol. 5, Abu Al Hajjāj Yūsuf Al Mazzi, Al Resalah Publishers, Beirut, Lebanon 1998

Dāwōd ibn Qays then reported it to Abdur Razzāq, the author of the famous ‘Al-Musannaf’. A diagram is given below to make all the lines of transmission clear;



Now that the entire transmission chain structure of Sā'ib ibn Yazēd's reports are clear we go on to examine all his available reports one by one;

- 1) Mālik reported from Muhammad ibn Yusuf, who reported from Sā'ib ibn Yazēd who said, “Umar ibn Al Khattāb instructed Ubay ibn Ka'b and Tamēm Al Dāri to lead people in prayer for eleven *raka'āt*. The reciter would recite the suras that consisted of 100 verses. Eventually we had to lean on canes due to the length of the prayer. We would only turn away from the prayer at the arrival of dawn. [Mu'atta Imam Mālik: 249]

Apparently this report is authentic because every narrator in its transmission chain is strong and reliable, however when analyzing the reports of Muhammad ibn Yusuf's remaining students, we find that a total different story is being told. Hāfiẓ Ibn Hajar writes in Fat'h Al Bāri;

- 2) “Muhammad ibn Nasr reported with a transmission chain leading to Muhammad ibn Is'hāq, who stated, “Muhammad ibn Yusuf reported to me from his grandfather, Sā'ib ibn Yazēd who said, “During ‘Umar's رضى الله عنه time we would pray 13 *raka'āt* in *Ramaẓhān*.”

Ibn Is'hāq said, “This is the most solid narration I have heard in connection to this matter. It coincides with ‘Ā'isha's رضى الله عنها hadēth on the Prophet's صلى الله عليه وسلم prayer during the night”

Here we find a clear contradiction between the two accounts. In the first narration Muhammad ibn Yusuf relates eleven *raka'āt* to Imam Mālik while in the second narration he reports thirteen *raka'āt* to Ibn Is'hāq. Some scholars have attempted to reconcile the two reports by claiming that the additional two *raka'āt* reported by Ibn Is'hāq are really the two *raka'āt* of the Fajr *Sunna*. This reconciliation can be deemed somewhat acceptable however the matter becomes problematic due to another narration;

- 3) Abdur Razzāq reported from Dāwōd ibn Qays and others, who have reported from Muhammad ibn Yusuf, who narrated from Sā'ib ibn Yazēd that ‘Umar رضى الله عنه gathered people during *Ramaẓhān* [to pray *tarāwēh*] behind Ubay ibn Ka'b and Tamēm Al Dāri for twenty one *raka'āt*. They would recite [suras that consisted of] one hundred verses and leave at the arrival of dawn.[Al Musannaf: 7730]

In this narration Muhammad ibn Yusuf narrated twenty one *raka'āt* to Dāwōd ibn Qays and other students. Some scholars have attempted to discredit this account by presenting the following two arguments;

- I. It contradicts the previous report by trustworthy reporters of eleven *raka'āt*.

This, in reality, is an invalid argument. By studying the principles of hadēth we find that when a reporter's account of a particular event contradicts other reports and every one of those reports are irreconcilable then they are all discarded and termed as *Mudh'tarab*. Here Muhammad ibn Yusuf has reported 11 *raka'āt* to Imam Mālik, 13 *raka'āt* to Ibn Is'hāq and 21 to Dāwōd ibn Qays. All their chains of transmission are authentic thus making it difficult to give preference to one report over the other. Therefore, due to such conditions, we would have no choice but to term these narrations as *Mudh'tarab* and disregard them all, especially when Muhammad ibn Yusuf's contemporaries are all relating 20 *raka'āt* as we will reveal in detail.

II. Abdur-Razzāq is the only narrator who has this wording.

This is another incorrect statement. It is clear stated in his chain that more than one person has narrated this number from Mohammad ibn Yusuf. Abdur-Razzāq himself has mentioned that he reported this account from Dāwōd ibn Qays and **OTHERS**, who have reported it from Muhammad ibn Yusuf.

Some people have tried to defame Abdur-Razzāq by claiming he is a defective reporter because he became blind in his latter years. Consequently he obtained dubious reports from others. They also allege that it is uncertain whether this particular report has been narrated before or after his confusion therefore it cannot be accepted.

It is true that Abdur Razzāq became blind in old age however this happened long after he compiled his book *Al Musannaf*. The hadēth we are currently debating is recorded in this very compilation. Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal, the famous imam of *fiqh* and a student of Abdur-Razzāq pointed out, "Whoever heard [a hadēth] from the book(s) of Abdur Razzāq then that [narration] is the most accurate."

In conclusion this particular hadēth is authentic but it cannot be used as evidence; not because of the unwarranted criticism aimed at Abdur Razzāq by certain individuals, but rather due to the irreconcilable numbers reported by Muhammad ibn Yusuf which have made his reports problematic and unreliable.

Interestingly Imam Mālik himself does not practice the narration of 11 *raka'āt* even though he is the very one who related it from Muhammad ibn Yusuf. He rather claims that the *tarāwēh* prayer is 41 *raka'āt*!

Sā'ib ibn Yazēd's second student is Yazēd ibn Khusayfa. His report has been documented and narrated by Ibn Abe Dhi'b, Muhammad ibn Ja'far and Imam Mālik. Their reports are as follows;

- 4) Ibn Abe Dhi'b reported from Yazēd ibn Khusayfa, who reported from Sā'ib ibn Yazēd who said, "People would stand in [prayer] during 'Umar ibn Khattāb's رضى الله عنه time in the month of *Ramaḏhān* for twenty *raka'āt*." He also added, "They would recite [suras that consist of] 100 verses and lean on their canes in the days of 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān رضى الله عنه due to the intensity of the prayer." [Sunan Al Bayhaqē: 4617]
- 5) Muhammad ibn Ja'far narrated, "Yazēd ibn Khusayfa reported to me from Sā'ib ibn Yazēd who said, "We would stand [in *tarāwēh*] during the time of 'Umar ibn Khattāb for twenty *raka'āt* with witr'." [Ma'rifat Al Sunan wa Al Aathār, Bayhaqē]
- 6) Ibn Hajar said, "Imam Mālik narrated through a transmission chain that leads to Yazēd ibn Khusayfa who reported twenty *raka'āt* from Sā'ib ibn Yazēd. [Fat'h Al Bari]

Upon observing these narrations one will notice that all of Yazēd ibn Khusayfa's reports are consistent in reporting twenty *raka'āt* unlike the inconsistent numbers narrated by Muhammad ibn Yusuf. However some people have stepped forth to criticize Yazēd ibn Khusayfa after doing a 'comprehensive background check' on him and have thus uncovered several elements of weakness in him. They are;

- a) Imam Ahmad has pointed out that Ibn Khusayfa's reporting is '*Munkar*'.

Before debating this point let's just take a look at what has been written about Yazēd in the books of '*Rijaal*'. Imam Mazzi has written the following about Yazēd in *Tah'dhīb Al Kamāl*;

- Abu Bakr ibn Athram reported from Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Abu Hātim and Nasa’ië (that Yazēd is) **trustworthy**.
- Abu Ubaidullah Al Aajuri reported from Abu Dāwōd that Imam Ahmad said, “Yazēd is a *Munkir Al Hadēth*.”
- Ahmad ibn Sa’d ibn Abu Maryam reported from Yaḥyā ibn Ma’een that Yazēd is **trustworthy** and an **authority**.
- Muhammad ibn Sa’d said, “Yazēd was a worshipper, an ascetic, a frequent reporter of hadēth and was **trustworthy**.”

From this information we learn that a total of 5 scholars have authenticated Yazēd and have labeled him as trustworthy. They are;

1. Ahmad ibn Hanbal
2. Abu Hātim
3. Imam Nasa’ië
4. Yaḥyā ibn Ma’een
5. Muhammad ibn Sa’d

On the other hand only one person has criticized him; Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal. His criticism contradicts the authentication he has issued along with other great scholars. It is based on this that Dr. Bashār ‘Awād Ma’ruf has written, “This [criticism] is not confirmed from Ahmad.”

He further writes “In ‘Elal (a book written by Imam Ahmad’s son) Abdullah has stated [about Yazēd ibn Khusayfa], “I only know good things about him,” and this is clear authentication!”

In conclusion Yazēd ibn Khusayfa is a trustworthy, authentic narrator. The criticism aimed at him by Imam Ahmad is to be discarded, especially when he is one of the many scholars who have authenticated him. Consequently Yazēd’s report will not be rejected but rather it will be accepted and shall serve as a strong piece of evidence.

Some people have argued that Ibn Khusayfa’s report is *Shādh*² because Muhammad ibn Yusuf is a stronger narrator than him. Hāfīẓ Ibn Hajar has described Muhammad as trustworthy and meticulous while he has only described Ibn Khusayfa as trustworthy. Now because Ibn Khusayfa’s report of twenty does not coincide with Muhammad ibn Yusuf’s report of eleven it shall be considered unreliable.

By studying the works of Hāfīẓ ibn Hajar we find the total opposite of what has been alleged. The following statements are found about each individual in Hāfīẓ’s famous work, Tah’dhēb Al-Tah’dhēb, an abridged version of Imam Mazzi’s Tah’dhēb Al Kamāl;

Muhammad ibn Yusuf

- Yaḥyā ibn Sa’ēd said, “Muhammad ibn Yusuf is more **trustworthy** than Abdur Rahmān ibn Hamēd and Abdur Rahmān ibn ‘Ammār. He was lame and a writer.”
- Sadaqa ibn Faẓhl said, “Yaḥyā ibn Sa’ēd used to praise him and give him preference over Muhammad ibn Abu Yaḥyā.”
- Bukhāri said, “Yaḥyā ibn Sa’ēd was like him.”
- Ibn Ma’een said, “Yaḥyā told me, ‘I have not seen any shaykh resemble him in **reliability**’.”
- Ibn Ma’een, Ahmad and Nasa’ië said, “[He is] **trustworthy**.”
- Mus’ab Al Zubairē said, “He was a noble man and he came to Madina.”
- Ibn Hibbān has mentioned him in [his book] Al Thiqāt.

² This is a ḥadēth that has been narrated by a reliable reporter however it contradicts the narrations of other stronger narrators.

I (Ibn Hajar) say, “Ibn Madēnē said, “Muhammad ibn Yusuf, the lame is **trustworthy**,” and Ibn Shā’hēn mentioned in Al Thiqāt, “Ahmad ibn Sālih (the Egyptian) said, ‘He is a man of great importance.’ He (also) said, “Ahmad ibn Sālih was amazed by him.” [p. 342 vol. 5, Dar Ihyā Al Turāth Al Arabi 1993]

Yazēd ibn Abdullah ibn Khusayfa

- Athram reported from Ahmad, Abu Hātim and Nasa’i that he is **trustworthy**.
- Al Aajuri reported from Abu Dāwōd that Ahmad mentioned, “He is *Munkir Al Hadēth*,” (this point has already been discussed).
- Ibn Abi Maryam reported from Ibn Ma’een that he is **trustworthy and an authority**.
- Ibn Sa’d said, “He was a worshipper, an ascetic, a frequent reporter of hadēth and was **trustworthy**.”
- Ibn Hibbān has listed him in [his book] Al Thiqāt.

I (Ibn Hajar) say, “Ibn Abdul Barr declared, “He was the nephew of Sā’ib ibn Yazēd and was **trustworthy and reliable**.” [p. 214 vol. 6, Dar Ihyā Al Turāth Al Arabi 1993]

These two extracts clearly show that the only words of authentication used for Muhammad ibn Yusuf are ‘trustworthy and reliable’, while for Yazēd words such as trustworthy, reliable and authority have been used thus making Yazēd a stronger narrator than Ibn Yusuf according to the rules of hadēth. Likewise there is no mention anywhere in these two extracts of Ibn Hajar calling Ibn Yusuf ‘meticulous’.

Another ‘element of weakness’ allegedly found in Ibn Khusayfa is that he is not as knowledgeable of Sā’ib ibn Yazēd’s reports as Muhammad ibn Yusuf because Muhammad ibn Yusuf was Sā’ib’s nephew unlike Ibn Khusayfa. Firstly, according to the rules of hadēth relationship does not enhance a reporter’s authenticity nor does it imply that he is more knowledgeable of his relative’s reports than others. Secondly, if by chance relationship was a factor that enhanced a person’s knowledge and reliability then Muhammad ibn Yusuf would not be any more knowledgeable than Yazēd because he too was Sā’ib’s nephew as has been mentioned in the above extract. In conclusion there are really no elements of weakness found in Ibn Khusayfa at all due to which his reports should be discredited.

The third student of Sā’ib ibn Yazēd is Hārith ibn Abdur Rahman ibn Abu Dhubāb, whose reports are as follows;

- 7) Ibn Abdul Barr related, “Hārith ibn Abdur Rahman ibn Abu Dhubāb reported from Sā’ib ibn Yazēd that the [night] prayer [in *Ramaḏhān*] during ‘Umar’s *رضى الله عنه* era was 23 *raka’āt*.” Ibn Abdul Barr then explained, “The [additional] three are considered to be the *witr* prayer.”
- 8) Abdur Razzāq recorded in his Al Musannaf from Aslami, who reported from Hārith ibn Abdur Rahman ibn Abi Dhubāb, who reported from Sā’ib ibn Yazēd, “We would finish the prayer close to the rise of dawn. The prayer during ‘Umar’s *رضى الله عنه* era was 23 *raka’āt*. [Hadēth no. 7733]

These two reports coincide with the authentic and consistent reports of Ibn Khusayfa above. Here Hārith has reported 20 *raka’āt* from Sā’ib ibn Yazēd with an additional 3 *raka’āt* for *witr* just as his contemporary, Ibn Khusayfa. This leads us to the conclusion that the correct number reported by Sā’ib is twenty and not eleven.

Some people have labeled these reports as weak due to Ibn Abu Dhubāb allegedly having a poor memory. The truth is that mixed opinions have been expressed by various scholars about his authenticity. Hāfiẓ ibn Hajar writes in Al Tah’dhēb;

- Ibn Ma’een said, “He is renowned.”
- Abu Hātim mentioned, “Darāwardi reported ‘*Munkar*’ narrations from him. He is not strong.”
- Abu Zur’ah said “He is unobjectionable.”

I [Ibn Hajar] say Ibn Hibbān has listed him in Al Thiqāt and has written, “He is from the accurate ones and passed away in the year 146 H...”

This clearly shows that Hāfiẓ Ibn Hajar considered Ibn Abu Dhubāb to be a trustworthy and authentic narrator, for he has based his verdict on Ibn Hibbān’s authentication. Therefore his narration of twenty *raka’āt* can be used as a reliable source. Even if one were to declare his narration weak, it would still be considered reliable due to it coinciding with the authentic and precise reports of Ibn Khusayfa. According to the principles of hadēth, if a weak report is supported by an authentic report, as is the case here, then the weak report would be upgraded to being reliable and would thus be categorized as ‘*Hasan le Ghairihi*’.

The people further argue that the status of the other narrators in the transmission chain is not known because Ibn Abdul Barr’s book is inaccessible today. Through this argument they are indirectly contending that this hadēth is unreliable because of this very factor. It is true that Ibn Abdul Barr’s book is not accessible however this very hadēth is found in Abdur Razzāq’s Al Musannaf with the following narrators;

1) Abdur Razzāq: An authentic narrator as we have discussed in great detail.

2) Ibrāhēm ibn Muhammad ibn Abi ibn Yaḥyā Al Aslami: This is a heavily criticized reporter due to some controversial beliefs he held. An interesting point to note though is that despite his corrupt beliefs some great scholars have considered him to be a trustworthy narrator of hadēths, such as Imam Shāfi’ē. Imam Mazzee has written in Tah’dhīb Al Kamāl, “Rabē’ ibn Sulaimān said, “I heard Imam Shāfi’ē say, “Ibrāhēm ibn Abi Yaḥyā was a Qadari.”³”

Rabē’ was then asked, “Then what caused Imam Shāfi’ē to narrate [hadēths] from him?”

He replied, “He used to say, ‘I would prefer that Ibrāhēm fall from a distant place rather than him resorting to lying. He was TRUSTWORTHY in hadēth!’”

Abu Ahmad ibn ‘Adē said, “I asked Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Sa’ēd, “Do you know anyone who has praised Ibrāhēm ibn Abi Yaḥyā apart from Imam Shāfi’ē?””

He replied, “Yes. Ahmad ibn Yaḥyā Al ‘Awdi told me that he heard Hamdān ibn Asbahāni say when he asked him “Do you embrace the narrations of Ibrāhēm ibn Abi Yaḥyā?”

He replied, “Yes.”

Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Sa’ēd then told me, “I studied the hadēths of Ibrāhēm ibn Yaḥyā extensively and [it turned out that] he is not a ‘*Munkir Al Hadēth*’.”

Abu Ahmad ibn ‘Adē further said, “This statement is precisely correct for indeed I myself have also studied many of his narrations and I did not find any of them to be unreliable except for those that were narrated from questionable shaykhs.”

In conclusion Ibrāhēm ibn Muhammad ibn Abi Yaḥyā’s narration here is reliable especially when it is coinciding with the authentic narrations of Ibn Khusayfa.

3) Hārith ibn Abdur Rahman ibn Abi Dhubāb

4) Sā’ib ibn Yazēd

All these narrators are trustworthy. Thus this hadēth will also be considered reliable.

Another hadēth on ‘Umar’s رضى الله عنه practice is;

³ A sect who believed

9) Mālik reported from Yazēd ibn Rōmān who said, “People would stand (in prayer) during the time of ‘Umar ibn Khattāb in the month of *Ramaẓhān* for twenty-three *raka’āt*.” [Al Mu’atta: 250]

Some people have labeled this hadēth weak due to it being *Mursal*⁴. Although this hadēth is *Mursal* it does not necessarily imply that it is weak. The reason behind this is that hadēth scholars in the past have held mixed views regarding its authenticity. Shaykh Muhammad Jamāluddēn has written in his book *Qawā’id Al Tahdēth* (The Rules of Narrating) that scholars are split into three groups on this issue;

1) Some scholars consider all such narrations weak and unauthentic.

2) Some scholars claim that all such narrations are authentic. This is the view of Imam Abu Hanēfa, Imam Mālik, Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Ibn Qayyim, Ibn Katheer and others.

3) Some scholars have laid out certain conditions for accepting such narrations such as Imam Shāfi’ē. Imam Nawawē writes in the preface of his book *Shar’h Al Muhadhab*, “Imam Shāfi’ē said, “Great *Tābi’ēn* have used *Mursal* narrations as evidence when;

- a. Its transmission chain is completely connected through another transmission chain...
- b. Or the narrator doing *Irsāl* (i.e. excluding the *Sahābē* from the chain) is a person who reports from other narrators ...
- c. Or the narration coincides with the statement of a *Sahābē*...
- d. Or the majority of scholars have passed a ruling in accordance to the information provided in the narration.

This is Imam Shāfi’ē’s general viewpoint pertaining to *Mursal* narrations. As for the *Mursal* narrations found in Imam Mālik’s *Mu’atta*, such as Yazēd ibn Rōmān hadēth which is currently under discussion, Imam Shāfi’ē states, “The most AUTHENTIC book after the book of Allah is *Mu’atta* Imam Mālik. Hadēth scholars agree that every single narration in it is AUTHENTIC according Imam Mālik’s view and those who agree with him. As for those who have other views, they state that there isn’t a single *Mursal*’ narration in it except that it is connected through other transmission chains. Hence its [*Mursal*] narrations will definitely be considered AUTHENTIC from this aspect. There were many [versions of] *Mu’atta* that were published in Imam Mālik’s time in which references have been provided for its narrations and it’s *Mursal* narrations have been connected; such as the versions prepared by Ibn Abi Dhi’b, Ibn Uyayna, Thawri and Ma’mar.” [Hujjatullah Al Bāligha]

In the light of this information it is safe to conclude that Yazēd ibn Rōmān’s narration is AUTHENTIC because firstly it is recorded in Imam Mālik’s *Mu’atta* and secondly Imam Shāfi’ē’s aforementioned conditions are all met.

10) Ibn Abu Shaybah reported, “Wakē’ reported to me, who reported from Mālik ibn Anas, who reported from Yaḥyā ibn Sa’ēd that Umar ibn Khattāb رضى الله عنه ordered a man to lead them in prayer for twenty *raka’āt*.” [Musannaf Ibn Abu Shaybah: Chapter 227 Hadēth no. 3]

Unfortunately this narration has also been criticized due a missing link between Yaḥyā ibn Sa’ēd and Umar ibn Khattāb رضى الله عنه as the former never met the latter. This causes the hadēth to be categorized as *Mursal* or *Munqati*⁵. However this does not necessarily render this narration weak as we have just discussed in great detail. According to Imam Abu Hanēfa, Imam Mālik, Imam Ahmad and other great scholars, this narration will unquestionably be acceptable, especially when all the reporters in its transmission chain are trustworthy and authentic. This narration will also be acceptable to Imam Shāfi’ē because;

1) Similar narrations have been reported with fully connected and authentic transmission chains such as the consistent and authentic reports of Ibn Khusayfa.

2) Imam Mālik (one of the narrators of this hadēth) has reported the exact same information from other scholars as we have previously observed.

⁴ This is a ḥadēth in which a reporter at the end of the transmission chain has been omitted.

⁵ This is a ḥadēth whose transmission chain has been interrupted due to one of its narrators being omitted from it.

- 3) It coincides with the report of the *Sahābē* Sā'ib ibn Yazēd رضى الله عنه.
- 4) The vast majority of scholars have passed a ruling about the *raka'āt* of *tarāwēh* according to the information provided in this narration.

In conclusion this report is undeniably acceptable and therefore can be used as evidence.

'Ali's رضى الله عنه *Instructions and Conduct*

- 1) Abu Al Hasnā reported, "Ali رضى الله عنه ordered a man to lead them in prayer during *Ramaẓhān* for twenty *raka'āt*." [Musannaf Ibn Abu Shaybah: Chapter 227 Hadēth no. 2]
- 2) Abu Al Hasnā reported, "Ali ibn Abu Tālib instructed a man to lead people in prayer for five *tarwēhāt* (or) twenty *raka'āt*."
Note: One *tarwēh* consists of four *raka'āt*. Imam Bayhaqē states, "There is weakness in this chain, and Allah knows best." [Sunan Al Bayhaqē: 4621]

The weakness in this transmission chain is due to Abu Al Hasnā, a person who scholars claim is unknown. It should be made clear that it is Abu Al Hasnā's reliability that is unknown and not him as an individual because three people are known to have reported from him;

- Sharēk ibn Abdullah Al Nakhai'ē
- Amr ibn Qais
- Abu Sa'd Al Baqqāl

No scholar has authenticated him nor criticized him. Therefore he would be labeled as *Majhōl Al Hāl* or *Mustōr* (a person whose condition is unknown). According to Ibn Hajar the ruling on such individuals is that their narration will neither be accepted nor rejected. Rather it will be put on hold until some clarification on their status is attained.

- 4) Hammād ibn Shu'ayb reported from 'Atā ibn Al Sā'ib, who reported from Abu Abdur Rahmān Al Sulami that Ali رضى الله عنه summoned the Reciters [of the Qur'an] in *Ramaẓhān* and ordered one of them to lead people for twenty *raka'āt*. Ali رضى الله عنه would then lead them in *witr*." [Sunan Al Bayhaqē: 4620]

Some people have pointed out that this hadēth is weak due to the following reasons;

- 'Atā ibn Al Sā'ib's reports become inconsistent due to old age
- Hammād ibn Shu'ayb is a weak reporter. Imam Bukhāri said about him, "He is questionable." He also said, "His reports are rejected."

These claims are true however it should be noted that according to the science of hadēth, weak hadēths do reinforce each other thus making them reliable and acceptable. Imam Nawawē said, "A weak hadēth ascends to the status of reliability when its transmission chains are multiple. Consequently it becomes acceptable and can be practiced." [Qawā'id Al Tahdēth]

This hadēth is supported by Abu al Hasnās report thus making it acceptable. It is for this very reason that Shaykh Al Islam Hāfiẓh Ibn Taimiyya has used this narration in his book *Minhāj Al Sunna* to prove that 'Ali رضى الله عنه had preserved 'Umar's رضى الله عنه practice of 20 *raka'āt* during his reign.. Likewise no other number has been recorded from 'Ali رضى الله عنه. Hence it would be safe to conclude that the established and confirmed practice of 'Ali رضى الله عنه was to observe 20 *raka'āt* of *tarāwēh* during the nights of *Ramaẓhān*.

Other Reports

- Abdur Rahmān reported from Hasan Abdul Aziz ibn Rufai' who said, "Ubay ibn Ka'b رضى الله عنه used to lead people in prayer during *Ramaẓhān* in Madina for twenty *raka'āt* and led them in *witr* for three *raka'āt*." [Musannaf Ibn Abu Shaybah: Chapter 227 Hadēth no. 5]

Although the link between Hasan Abdul Aziz and Ubay رضى الله عنه is missing thus making this narration *Mursal*, it is a reliable report. Hasan Abdul Aziz is a trustworthy and authentic reporter of hadëth and has met and reported from great *Sahäbäs* such as Anas ibn Mälik, Ibn ‘Umar and Ibn ‘Abbäs رضى الله عنهم. It is highly possible that he reported this account from one of them. Nevertheless we have already discussed the status of *Mursal* reports.

- Abu Ja’far Al Rāzi reported from Rabë’ ibn Anas, who reported from Abu Al Aaliya, who narrated from Ubay ibn Ka’b رضى الله عنه that ‘Umar رضى الله عنه instructed him to lead people in the *qiyām* of *Ramaẓhän* saying, “People fast during the day and are unable to recite well [at night], so will you recite the Qur’än for them during the night?”

He replied, “O Leader of the Believers, this [is a practice that] has never been done before.”

Umar said, “I know, however it is good.”

So he led them for twenty *raka’ät*.” [Al Mukhtära, Diyä Al Maqdisi]

The transmission chain of this report is weak due to Abu Ja’far Al Rāzi; a reporter who scholars have criticized. Although some scholars have also authenticated him by declaring that he is trustworthy, their authentication is overridden by the criticism issued by other scholars as per the rules of hadëth sciences. Hence Abu Ja’far will be considered weak. However this report will not be deemed weak but rather reliable because it coincides with the previously established and authentic report of Umar رضى الله عنه ordering the observance of twenty *raka’ät*. Therefore this report will be categorized as *Hasan le Ghairihi* and can be used as evidence.

Interestingly in this report Ubay remarked, “This [is a practice that] has never been done before.” The reason behind this comment was that after the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم had introduced this prayer, people began to observe it both individually and collectively. Neither did the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم gather everyone behind one imam to observe it nor did Abu Bakr رضى الله عنه. Umar was the first to suggest the idea as it is made clear in the following account;

Abdur Rahmān ibn Abdul Qāri said, “I accompanied ‘Umar ibn Al Khattāb رضى الله عنه one night during *Ramaẓhän* to the Masjid and found people performing *salāh* in different groups. One person was performing *salāh* alone while another was performing it with a small group [of people] behind him. As a result ‘Umar رضى الله عنه suggested, “In my opinion, if I were to gather all these people behind one reciter, this would definitely be better!”

He then made up his mind and collected them behind Ubay ibn Ka’b رضى الله عنه. The next night I again accompanied him and [saw that] people were performing *salāh* behind their reciter. ‘Umar رضى الله عنه remarked, “This is an excellent innovation!” [Bukhāri: 2010]

The Consensus of the Sahāba

From the above discussion it becomes evident that all the *Sahāba* رضى الله عنهم observed twenty *raka’ät* for the *tarāwëh* prayer. This implies that the *Sahāba* were of the consensus that *tarāwëh* should be no less than twenty *raka’ät*. ‘Ali ibn Sultan Al Qāri has written, “Häfīẓ Ibn Hajar said, “The *Sahāba* developed a consensus on *tarāwëh* being twenty *raka’ät*” [Mirqāt Al Mäfatëh p.382 vol. 3, Maktaba Haqqāniyya, Multan, Pakistan]

Abu Bakr ibn Mas’öd Al Käsāni Al Hanafi has written, “‘Umar رضى الله عنه gathered the companions of Allah’s Messenger صلى الله عليه وسلم during the month of *Ramaẓhän* behind Ubay ibn Ka’b رضى الله عنه, who lead them every night for twenty *raka’ät* and nobody objected to this practice. Therefore this will be considered a consensus on their behalf on this issue!” [Badäi’ Al Sanäi’ p.275 vol. 2, Dar Al-Kotob Al-Ilmiyah, Beirut, Lebanon, 1997]

The Verdict of the Scholars of the Early Generations

An interesting point to note is that although there were differences between our pious predecessors regarding the number of *raka'āt* for the *tarāwēh* prayer, the numbers they have differed over is 41 and 20. Not a single scholar from the early generations was of the view that *tarāwēh* is 8 *raka'āt*. This implies that 'Ā'isha's hadēth *رضى الله عنها* was never treated as a narration on the *tarāwēh* prayer of the Prophet *صلى الله عليه وسلم* nor were the narrations of Jabir *رضى الله عنه* or Sā'ib ibn Yazēd *رضى الله عنه* in which eight *raka'āt* of *tarāwēh* along with three *raka'āt* of *witr* is reported considered reliable by them. Had they been credible they would have certainly practiced it.

Imam Tirmidhē writes in his *Jāme'*, "Scholars have differed over [the number of *raka'āt*] for the night prayer during *Ramaẓhān*. Some maintain that 41 *raka'āt* should be offered along with *witr*. This is the verdict of the residents of Madina (i.e. Imam Mālik) and this is what they practice in Madina. The MAJORITY of scholars practice upon the reports of 'Ali, 'Umar *رضى الله عنهما* and other companions of the Prophet *صلى الله عليه وسلم*, which is TWENTY *raka'āt*. This is the verdict of Sufyān Al Thawri, Ibn Mubārak and Shāfi'ē. Imam Shāfi'ē expressed, "This is what I have found in our city of Makka. People observe TWENTY *raka'āt*." [Book 6, Chapter 81]

The Minimum Number Permitted

In the light of all the information presented here it becomes firmly established that the *Sahāba* *رضى الله عنهم* observed twenty *raka'āt* for the *tarāwēh* prayer. There is no confirmed report of any of them offering only eight *raka'āt*, rather it is confirmed that 'Umar *رضى الله عنه* ordered them to pray twenty *raka'āt*. Therefore it is obligatory to adhere to this number without decreasing anything from it. The Prophet *صلى الله عليه وسلم* ordered, "Those of you who will live [after me] will witness significant differences. So adhere to my practice and the practice of the Rightly Guided Successors. Bite their practices with your canines [i.e. hold on to them firmly] and beware of novel matters because every innovation is an act of misguidance!" [Abu Dāwōd: 4607, Tirmidhē: 2678]

In another hadēth the Prophet *صلى الله عليه وسلم* added, "...and every act of misguidance will take one to the fire [of Hell]."

This hadēth teaches us how to resolve our differences on religious matters. Since the number of *raka'āt* for the *tarāwēh* prayer has become controversial today we should solve the controversy by referring to the *Sunna* of the Prophet *صلى الله عليه وسلم* and his Rightly Guided Successors, which was to observe twenty *raka'āt*.

Had another number been confirmed from any of the Rightly Guided Successors or anyone else from among the knowledgeable companions, we would have definitely resorted to it. However since no other number is confirmed from them, as it has been established in this article, we do not consider any number less than twenty permissible.

We pray that this article serves as guidance for those who truly love the *Sahāba* and aspire to defend their teachings. A true defender of the *Sahāba* would verify reports from them and then abide by them.

May Allah guide us all to the straight path and keep us steadfast on it. Ameen